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ARTISTIC MOULDINGS.

ONWARDS from mediæval times mouldings have embodied every style of art in plastic materials, as in structural and decorative addendas to architecture, for ornamentally enriching furniture, and for objects of utility and luxury. Although the term moulding has been extended to hand carving, we here limit it to its original signification. Most mouldings receive a finish to the surface after being cast; gold and silver articles are additionally ornamented, and color comes to the aid of plastic materials. By the art of moulding artistic products are multiplied to an extent impossible to be reached by hand manipulation.

The principle which the best designers of mouldings have always maintained is the grouping of masses, consisting of irregular straight lines and convolutions in different planes, and thus by providing a distance and middle distance avoiding the confusion that would arise from giving to each part the same prominence. Without profiling in different planes and a skilled method of arrangement we may get a labyrinthine grouping of leaves, figures and scrolls without beginning or end, which, whilst defying ready perception of leading forms, will be neither vigorous nor spirited, possibly intricate and certainly ineffective,—the characteristics of some of the early ceiling centers when massive mouldings were the rule, these being usually mere triumphs of manual dexterity. Apart from design, the ideal in technical execution of mouldings is probably higher at this time than the world has ever seen.

It is impossible to enumerate all the resources of the designer of mouldings, but among these may be mentioned, as always gratifying to the eye, the alternation of position. Thus in the filling in of furniture friezes, entablatures and spandrels of arched contours, is the opposing the figures to each other on each side of a medial line. A favorite device for the irregular form of spandrels consists of two females reclining, or two cupids on the wing.

The matter of æsthetic proportion, such as is apposite to taste, and not to be determined by geometric rule, is a vital consideration in determining the space a relief figure enclosed by a moulding shall fill. It is wholly distinct from balance of repetition or the question of the adaptation of the design to its purpose.

The refined taste of the present day excludes from mouldings all overcrowding of details, as well as overcrowding in the available space. Whether on walls, ceilings or furniture, or other objects, simplicity secures vigor of delineation and fuller play for the exhibition a fire and power, whilst undue elaboration tends to crudeness. The flamboyant style in which the curve obtains the complete mastery is now seldom met with. Though possessing the characteristics of softness, gentleness and ease, it

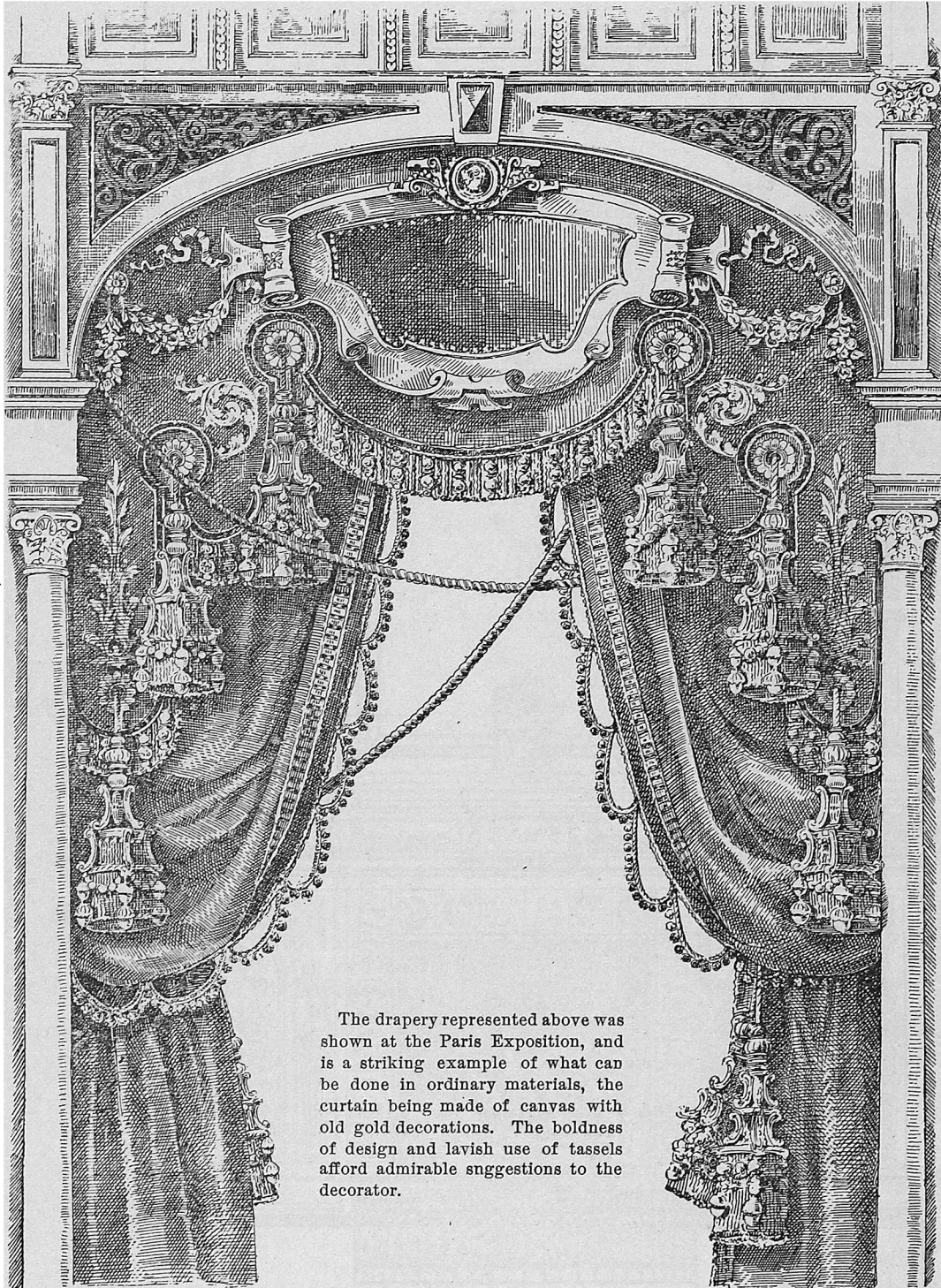
requires for the best effects to be united to the angle, with its opposite characteristics of firmness and severity. In the representation of scroll work this feature is usually supplied in the borders. In short, the abounding angles in our rooms, arising from their construction and also largely provided by the furniture, justifies a considerable display in mouldings of flowing reticulations in corbels and friezes.

In the early period of the Italian renaissance, friezes were moulded after the Greek style, but presently the forms grew in richness, and we see yet the acanthus and perforated vines of fine workmanship as frieze pieces, with colonettes beneath, supported by carved corbels. Then, as since, a greater proportion of carved work than mouldings has been adopted in Italy for the decoration and structural divisions of the upper space of wall. Cement is chiefly used where marble is difficult to be had.

The exquisite designs in papier mache to be met with in wall and ceiling decorations, exhibit a delicacy and finish unapproached by other compo moulding material. It is all but indispensable for relief panels and raised arabesque, and other figures in middle space of wall, and is used for pendants, finials, picture frames, festoons; figures in the round gracefully reclining on an entablature, for caryatides supporting friezes, on caskets, book cases, and as brackets.

The study of perspective—the effects of receding planes of space, as well as a correct idea of shading and lighting. In leaf moulding, each leaf should modify the next one to it by casting its shadow, and be so arranged as to show little patches of highlight. A study of nature will show where and how leaves cut each other, thus securing perspective or apparent diminution. Whilst the leaves in front show their full size and shape, those further back appear as three-quarter, half or only half next to the stem. By the foliage in some parts overlapping the stem, their connection with it is pleasingly rather suggested than indicated.

The painter's art adds interest to structural detail. By the skill with which colors are selected and applied he may frequently counterbalance defective proportions, and where the mouldings are structural, supply the absence of expression. To features that need support, a heavier aspect can be imparted, and in scroll work, where the design is either painted or moulded, a moulded border is untouched; for foliage it should be the starting point of the stems. An important point, never to be overlooked, is the relative proportion of the whole of the ornament to the space it occupies. The smaller the figures in cornice and frieze mouldings, the more brilliant the colors that may be employed, provided that the ground is sufficiently toned down. A profusion of colors, however, is, as a rule, to be avoided. Some admirable effects are often obtained by tints, delicate and full of light, that separately leave no definite impression. More brilliant colors than otherwise may be used where wall mouldings run the risk of escaping attention, either from defective light or other



The drapery represented above was shown at the Paris Exposition, and is a striking example of what can be done in ordinary materials, the curtain being made of canvas with old gold decorations. The boldness of design and lavish use of tassels afford admirable suggestions to the decorator.

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

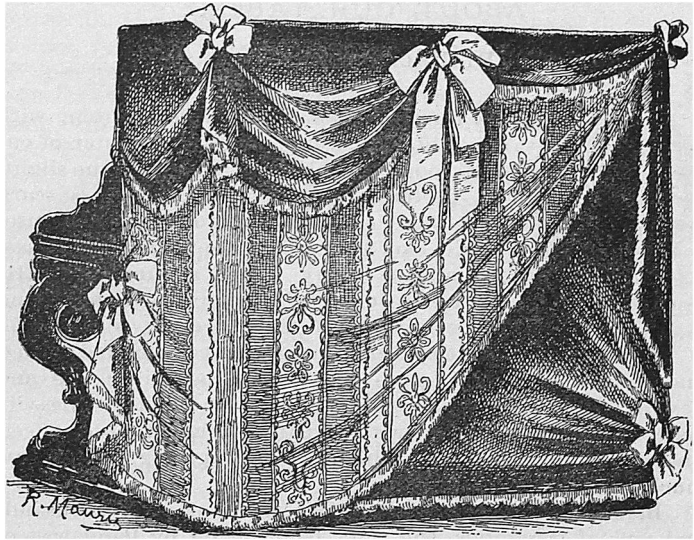
attractions. As relief work largely depends for effect on light and shade, there is much art in properly emphasizing with color the salient points, and where the forms present convolutions delicately gradating the shades of retiring surfaces. The modern increase of depth of frieze has lessened the necessity for the prominence formerly given to cornices in dimensions that rendered their appearance cumbrous and heavy. Their functional purpose remains.

Bronze moulding would seem to be regaining its former pre-eminence, not only in statuettes but as in panels representing pastoral, hunting, historic and dramatic scenes and tableaux of the same kind framed to be hung on walls, the originals of some of which are antiques. There are various formulas for the composition of bronze, the ordinary components being copper and tin. The bronzists of the East have for centuries sought to keep their secret as to the composition of the metal in respect to the production of certain colors such as violet, but chemistry has unlocked these. A Chinese violet bronze analyzed showed a mere trace of oxide of copper, the rest of the ingredients being silica, lead, manganese, iron, zinc, soda and potash.

A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE.

MR. J. B. TIFFANY, who is probably one of the most prominent experts in New York on interior decorations, remarked recently in a published interview, that there was a tendency to relax the mental strain which the public had labored under in recent years to decorate on its own account.

"The people in general," said Mr. Tiffany, "are beginning to realize that a little knowledge of decoration is quite as dangerous as a little knowledge of other things, and there is an effort to get away from the cheap and vulgar devices which have been an eye-sore and a blot on the taste of the people so long in New York. Nobody knows exactly when the absurd rage for decoration first started, and it was not fully condemned until it reached a phase bordering on the ludicrous. When cigar stores, drinking saloons, drawing rooms, opera houses, butcher shops, and every other conceivable habitation of man began to riot in what was erroneously known as the Queen Anne style of decoration, it was easy to see where the end would be. Cheap bits of stained glass, lots of yellow woodwork, bizarre colors, and a wealth of inharmonious and painful discords made the current decoration in New York resemble corned beef hash, as much as anything else that I can think of at the moment. It produced in time a healthy resentment, and the public at last discovered that there was a body of architects and colorists who had made this particular branch of decoration a life study, so that now



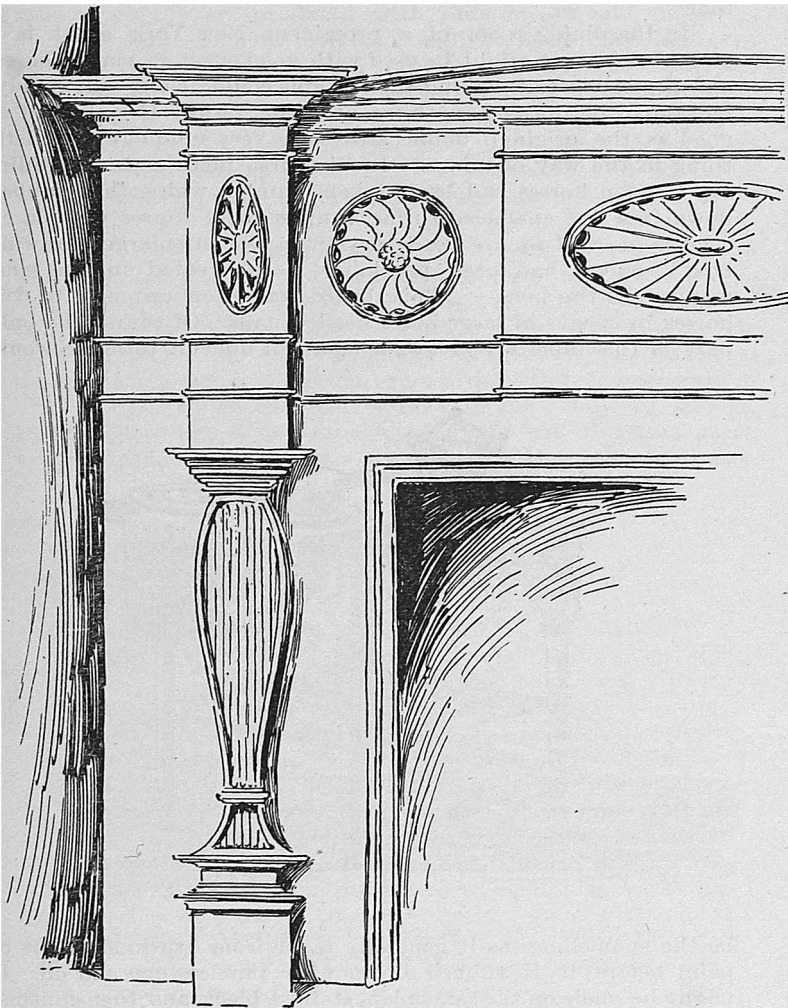
DRAPED PIANO BACK.—Flame-red plush, edged with gold fringe, and combined with écaru, étamine embroidered in Pompadour flowers. Bows in Ottoman and tinsel ribbon.

professional experts are called in as much for the purpose of removing other 'decorations' as for any other purpose. In fact, the business now consists, to a considerable extent, in undoing much that has been laboriously done. Decorating has reached the same plane here that it has in Europe, from the recovering of the White House down to the finishing of most of the New York houses. The selection of the colors and the general design are given to men who have displayed special aptitude for that particular branch of work. For all of which the public has reason to be grateful."

EXPORT OF AMERICAN FURNITURE.

RELATIVELY to amount and value of production, there is less of international trade in furniture than any other artistic production. With the exception of Mexico and South America, where European and American tastes as to furniture are steadily growing, each nation would seem to be sufficient to itself. Hitherto England has had the greater part of the foreign furniture trade south of us, having special facilities of shipment by numerous established lines, which are assured of a return cargo to our own or other foreign ports, whence they take out another cargo for England, and as Mexican and South American merchants have banking accounts in London, payments are readily effected, there being no loss on exchange. One cause that has rendered our trade with those countries so unimportant and almost profitless is that England is enabled to place articles at lower cost for the reasons stated, and gives the long credits required, which our manufacturers are unwilling to do, besides having the advantage of long established connection. A wealthy New York mercantile house, which has done a large commission business with the Argentine Republic, proposes to strike out a new line by purchasing furniture at our chief manufacturing centers, to be paid for on delivery at New York; sending it on to their agent at Buenos Ayres, himself a native of the country, who will give the customary credits. The people of the Argentine Confederation prefer to trade with natives. Thus, by concentrating the business and so lessening the cost of storing, displaying and pushing the goods, as compared with shipments on individual account, and, further, by the intimate knowledge possessed by the agent, now on a tour to our furniture centers, it is believed that English furniture can be undersold. Should the plan prove successful, it will be extended by the firm to other South American countries. We heartily wish it success. It appears to be a practical method of dealing with the present exigencies of our furniture export trade.

It is often a matter of surprise to those who select wall paper from a sample to find that it does not look so well on the wall. Such paper is likely either to have a defect of inharmonious ratio of color, which has escaped the notice of the unpracticed eye when seen in a small quantity, or there is a faulty distribution of color, as where white introduced in small detached quantities among the colors will give the appearance of alternate white strips running through them, or the forms not being in proper relation to the distribution of color, or there is over elaboration. What appears a defective pattern in the piece, thus expands on a large scale into unpleasing lines, spotty or other undesirable effects. Generally, however, the high artistic wall hangings of our leading manufacturers may be relied on for freedom from these faults. Designers themselves are trained to avoid them.



COLONIAL FIRE-PLACE IN HOUSE OF J. B. MERRITT, KATONAH, N. Y.
SKETCHED BY R. Y. BARROWS.